

Realism: *Realism* is, in the broadest sense, simply fidelity to actuality in its representation in literature; a term loosely synonymous with VERISIMILITUDE; and in this sense it has been a significant element in almost every school of writing in human history. In order to give it more precise definition, however, one needs to limit it to the movement which arose in the nineteenth century, at least partially in reaction against ROMANTICISM, which was centered in the NOVEL, and which was dominant in France, England, and America from roughly mid-century to the closing decade, when it was replaced by NATURALISM. In this latter sense, *realism* defines a literary method, a philosophical and political attitude, and a particular kind of subject matter.

Realism has been defined as "the truthful treatment of material" by one of its most vigorous advocates, William Dean Howells, but the statement means little until the realists' concept of truth and their selection of materials are designated. Generally, realists are believers in PRAGMATISM, and the truth they seek to find and express is a relativistic truth, associated with discernible consequences and verifiable by experience. Generally, too, realists are believers in democracy, and the materials they elect to describe are the common, the average, the everyday. Furthermore, *realism* can be thought of as the ultimate of middle-class art, and it finds its subjects in bourgeois life and manners. Where romantics transcend the immediate to find the ideal, and naturalists plumb the actual to find the scientific laws which control its actions, realists center their attention to a remarkable degree on the immediate, the here and now, the specific action, and the verifiable consequence. (See NATURALISM for a further discussion of the distinctions among these three terms.)

Realists espouse what is essentially a MIMETIC THEORY OF ART, centering their attention in the thing imitated and asking for something close to a one-to-one correspondence between the representation and the subject. They usually have, however, a powerful interest in the audience to whom their work is addressed, feeling it to be their obligation to deal with it with absolute truthfulness. Furthermore, realists are unusually interested in the effect their work has on the audience and its life (in this respect they tend toward a PRAGMATIC THEORY OF ART); George Eliot, in Chapter XVII of *Adam Bede* (a classic statement of the intention of the realist), expresses her desire that her pictures of common life and average experience should knit more tightly the bonds of human sympathy among her readers. Howells, concerned with his audience of young ladies, felt so strongly the obligation not to do them moral injury that he shut the doors of his own works to most of the aspects of life connected with passion and sex.

Realists eschew the traditional patterns of the NOVEL. In part the rise of *realism* came as a protest against the falseness and sentimentality which realists thought they saw in romantic FICTION. Life, they felt, lacked symmetry and PLOT; FICTION which truthfully reflected life should, therefore, avoid symmetry and PLOT. Simple, clear, direct PROSE was the desirable vehicle, and objectivity on the part of the novelist the proper attitude. The central issues of life tend to be ethical—that is, issues of conduct. FICTION should, therefore, concern itself with such issues, and—since selection is a necessary part of any art—select with a view to presenting these issues accurately as they affect men and women in actual situations. Furthermore, the democratic attitudes of realists tended to

make them value the individual very highly and to praise CHARACTERIZATION as the center of the NOVEL. Hence, they had a great concern for the effect of ACTION upon CHARACTER, and a tendency to explore the psychology of the actors in their stories. In Henry James, perhaps the greatest of the realists, this tendency to explore the inner selves of characters confronted with complex ethical

choices earned for him not only the title of "father of the PSYCHOLOGICAL NOVEL" but also the title of "biographer of fine consciences."

The surface details, the common actions, and the minor catastrophes of a middle-class society constituted the chief subject matter of the movement. Most of the realists avoided situations with tragic or cataclysmic implications. Their tone was often comic, frequently satiric, seldom grim or somber. Their general attitude was broadly optimistic, although James is a great exception.

Although aspects of *realism* appeared almost with the beginnings of the English NOVEL, for they are certainly present in Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Jane Austen, Trollope, Thackeray, and Dickens, the realistic movement found its effective origins in France with Balzac, in England with George Eliot, and in America with Howells and Mark Twain. Writers like Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, and H. G. Wells in England, and Henry James, Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, Sinclair Lewis, John O'Hara, John P. Marquand, and Louis Auchincloss in America kept and are keeping the realistic tradition alive in the contemporary NOVEL.

It should be emphasized, however, that no single realistic NOVEL exemplifies all the characteristics that are listed in this article. In general, though, the realistic NOVEL tends toward the directions here indicated. See NATURALISM, ROMANTICISM.

Naturalism: A term sometimes applied to writing that demonstrates a deep interest in NATURE, such as Wordsworth and other Romantic writers had; and sometimes used to describe any form of extreme REALISM, although this usage is a very loose one. It should properly be reserved to designate a literary movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in France, America, and England.

In its simplest sense *naturalism* is the application of the principles of scientific DETERMINISM to FICTION and DRAMA. It draws its name from its basic assumption that everything that is real exists in NATURE, NATURE being conceived as the world of objects, actions, and forces which yield the secrets of their causation and their being to objective scientific inquiry. The fundamental view of human beings which the naturalist takes is that of animals in the natural world, responding to environmental forces and internal stresses and drives, over none of which they have control and none of which they fully understand. It tends to differ from REALISM, not in its attempt to be accurate in the portrayal of its materials but in the selection and organization of those materials, selecting not the commonplace but the representative and so arranging the materials that the structure of the NOVEL or PLAY reveals the pattern of ideas—in this case, scientific theory—which forms the author's view of the nature of experience. In this sense, *naturalism* shares with ROMANTICISM a belief that the actual is important not in itself but in what it can reveal about the nature of a larger reality; it differs sharply from ROMANTICISM, however, in finding that reality not in transcendent ideas or absolute ideals but in the scientific laws

which can be perceived through the action of individual instances. This distinction may be illustrated in this way. Given a block of wood and a force pushing upon it, producing in it a certain acceleration: *REALISM* will tend to concentrate its attention on the accurate description of that particular block, that special force, and that definite acceleration; *ROMANTICISM* will tend to see in the entire operation an illustration or symbol or suggestion of a philosophical truth and will so represent the block, the force, and the acceleration—often with complete fidelity to fact—that the idea or ideal that it bodies forth is the center of the interest; and *naturalism* will tend to see in the operation a clue or a key to the scientific law which undergirds it and to be interested in the relationships among the force, the block, and the produced acceleration, and will so represent the operation that Newton's second law of motion (even on occasion in its mathematical expression— $F \propto ma$) is demonstrated or proved by this representative instance of its universal occurrence in nature.

In this sense *naturalism* is the writer's response to the revolution in thought that modern science has produced. From Newton it gains a sense of mechanistic determinism; from Darwin (the greatest single force operative upon it) it gains a sense of biological determinism and the inclusive *METAPHOR* of the lawless jungle which it has used perhaps more often than any other; from Marx it gains a view of history as a battleground of vast economic and social forces; from Freud it gains a view of the determinism of the inner and subconscious self; from Taine it gains a view of literature as a product of deterministic forces; from Comte it gains a view of social and environmental determinism. In the most influential statement ever made of the theory of *naturalism*, Émile Zola's *Le roman expérimental*, the ideal of the naturalist is stated as the selection of truthful instances subjected to laboratory conditions in a novel, where the hypotheses of the author about the nature and operation of the forces that work upon human beings can be put to the test. Zola's term *expérimental*, usually translated "experimental," is more properly understood as "empirical."

Although the fidelity to detail and the disavowal of the assumptions of the Romantics give *naturalism* clear affinities with *REALISM*, so that it is often confused in its origins with that movement and Balzac and Flaubert are credited with being naturalists, the Goncourt brothers and Zola are generally recognized as having begun the naturalistic novel and codified its theory. Strong elements of *naturalism* are to be seen in the work of George Eliot and of Thomas Hardy, but American novelists have been generally more receptive to its theories than the English have. Frank Norris (1870–1902) wrote naturalistic novels in conscious imitation of Zola and made an American critical defense of the school, *The Responsibilities of the Novelist*, in which he saw that its real enemy was *REALISM* and not *ROMANTICISM*. Stephen Crane (1871–1900) used the devices of *IMPRESSIONISM* in producing naturalistic novels. Jack London (1876–1916) wrote naturalistic novels with Nietzschean "supermen" (and "superdogs") as *PROTAGONISTS*. But the greatest American naturalistic novelist—after Zola perhaps the greatest of all—was Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945), whose *An American Tragedy* is an archetypal American example. In the *DRAMA* Eugene O'Neill employed *naturalism* with distinction. James T. Farrell and James Jones, among others, have kept the school alive in America.

The works produced in this school have tended to emphasize either a biological determinism, with an emphasis on the animal nature of human beings, particularly their heredity, portraying them as animals engaged in the endless and brutal struggle for survival, or a socioeconomic determinism, portraying them as the victims of environmental forces and the products of social and economic factors beyond their control or full understanding. Occasionally, as in the works of Thomas Hardy, human beings are seen as the victims of "destiny" or "fate." But whichever of these views is taken, the naturalist strives to be objective, even documentary, in the presentation of material; to be amoral in his or her view of the struggle in which human animals find themselves, neither condemning nor praising human beings for actions which they cannot control; to be pessimistic in his or her view of human capabilities—life, the naturalist seems to feel, is a vicious trap, a cruel game; to be frank and almost clinically direct in the portrayal of human beings as animals driven by fundamental urges—fear, hunger, and sex; to be deterministic in the portrayal of human actions, seeing them as explicable in cause-and-effect relationships; and to exercise a bias in the selection of CHARACTERS and ACTIONS, frequently choosing primitive CHARACTERS and simple, violent ACTIONS as best giving "experimental conditions." No single naturalistic work displays completely this catalog of qualities, but taken together they tend to define the directions and intentions of *naturalism*.

Romanticism: A MOVEMENT of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which marked the reaction in literature, philosophy, art, religion, and politics from the NEOCLASSICISM and formal orthodoxy of the preceding period. *Romanticism* arose so gradually and exhibited so many phases that a satisfactory definition is not possible. The aspect most stressed in France is reflected in Victor Hugo's phrase "liberalism in literature," meaning especially the freeing of the artist and writer from the restraints and rules of the classicists and suggesting that phase of individualism marked by the encouragement of revolutionary political ideas. The poet Heine noted the chief aspect of German *romanticism* in calling it the revival of medievalism in art, letters, and life. A late nineteenth-century English critic, Walter Pater, thought the addition of strangeness to beauty (the neoclassicists having insisted upon order in beauty) constituted the romantic temper. An American transcendentalist, Dr. F. H. Hedge, thought the essence of *romanticism* was aspiration, having its origin in wonder and mystery. An interesting schematic explanation calls *romanticism* the predominance of IMAGINATION OVER reason and formal rules (CLASSICISM) and over the sense of fact or the actual (REALISM), a formula which recalls Hazlitt's statement (1816) that the CLASSIC beauty of a Greek temple resided chiefly in its actual form and its obvious connotations, while the "romantic" beauty of a GOTHIC building or ruin arose from associated ideas which the IMAGINATION was stimulated to conjure up. The term is used in many senses, a favorite recent one being that which sees in the romantic mood a psychological desire to escape from unpleasant realities.

Perhaps more useful to the student than definitions will be a list of romantic characteristics or "earmarks," though *romanticism* was not a clearly conceived system. Among the aspects of the "romantic" movement in England may be listed: SENSIBILITY; PRIMITIVISM; love of NATURE; sympathetic interest in the past, especially the medieval (see GOTHIC); MYSTICISM; individualism; ROMANTIC CRITICISM; and a reaction against whatever characterized NEOCLASSICISM.

Among the specific characteristics embraced by these general attitudes are: the abandonment of the HEROIC COUPLET in favor of BLANK VERSE, the SONNET, the SPENSERIAN STANZA, and many experimental VERSE FORMS; the dropping of the conventional POETIC DICTION in favor of fresher language and bolder figures; the idealization of rural life (Goldsmith); enthusiasm for the wild, irregular, or GROTESQUE in NATURE and art; unrestrained IMAGINATION; enthusiasm for the uncivilized or "natural"; interest in human rights (Burns, Byron); sympathy with animal life (Cowper); sentimental melancholy (Gray); emotional psychology in FICTION (Richardson); collection and imitation of popular BALLADS (Percy, Scott); interest in ancient Celtic and Scandinavian mythology and literature (see CELTIC REVIVAL); renewed interest in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. Typical literary forms of the romantic writers include the LYRIC, especially the love LYRIC, the reflective LYRIC, the nature LYRIC (see NATURE), and the LYRIC of morbid melancholy (see GRAVEYARD SCHOOL); the SENTIMENTAL NOVEL; the METRICAL ROMANCE; the SENTIMENTAL COMEDY; the BALLAD; the PROBLEM NOVEL; the HISTORICAL NOVEL; the GOTHIC ROMANCE; the SONNET; and the CRITICAL ESSAY (see ROMANTIC CRITICISM).

Although the romantic movement in English literature had its beginnings or anticipations in the earlier eighteenth century (Shaftesbury, Thomson, Dyer, Lady Winchilsea), it was not till the middle of the century that its characteristics became prominent and self-conscious (Blair, Akenside, Joseph and Thomas Warton, Gray, Richardson, Sterne, Walpole, Goldsmith, and somewhat later Cowper, Burns, and Blake), while its complete triumph was reserved for the early years of the nineteenth century (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Southey, Byron, Shelley, Keats). A little later in the nineteenth century came the great romantic period in American literature (Bryant, Emerson, Lowell, Thoreau, Whittier, Hawthorne, Melville).

The last third of the nineteenth century witnessed the substitution of a soberer mood than prevailed earlier in the century, and although the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, in both England and America, have been marked by a sharp reaction against the romantic, especially the sentimental, spirit in literature, it is to be remembered that much late VICTORIAN literature was romantic and that the vitality of *romanticism* is evidenced by the great volume of romantic writing being produced in the twentieth century.

By way of caution it may be said that such descriptions of *romanticism* as this one probably overstress the distinction between *romanticism* and CLASSICISM or NEOCLASSICISM, and cannot hope to resolve that confusion over what "romantic" means which Professor A. O. Lovejoy asserts has "for a century been the scandal" of literary history and criticism. As early as 1824 an effort to discover what the authorities meant by the term proved disappointing, and the succeeding century has increased the number of divergent, often contradictory, senses in which the term is employed. Some writers, like Professor Walter Raleigh and Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, have even urged the desirability of abandoning the terms "romantic" and "classic," pointing out that their use adds to the critical confusion and tends to distort the facts of literary history and divert attention away from the natural processes of literary composition. Several have noted that Homer's *Odyssey*, for example, is cited by some as the very essence of the romantic, by others as a true exemplar of CLASSICISM. Professor Lovejoy, noting that the "romantic"

movement has meant different things in different countries and that even in a single country "romantic" is often used in conflicting senses, proposes that the term be employed in the plural only, as a recognition of the various *romanticisms*. Even if the term "romantic" were always employed in the same sense and its characteristics could be safely and comprehensively enumerated, it would still be true that one could not use a single characteristic, like the love of wild scenery or the use of BLANK VERSE, as a "key" for classifying as romantic any single poem or poet.

Yet, viewed in philosophical terms, *romanticism* does have a fairly definite meaning for the student of literature. The term designates a literary and philosophical theory which tends to see the individual at the very center of all life and all experience, and it places the individual, therefore, at the center of art, making literature most valuable as an expression of his or her unique feelings and particular attitudes (the EXPRESSIVE THEORY OF ART) and valuing its accuracy in portraying the individual's experiences, however fragmentary and incomplete, more than it values its adherence to completeness, UNITY, or the demands of GENRE. It places a high premium upon the creative function of the IMAGINATION, seeing art as a formulation of intuitive imaginative perceptions that tend to speak a nobler truth than that of fact, logic, or the here and now. It sees in NATURE a revelation of Truth, the "living garment of God," and often, pantheistically, a sensate portion of deity itself, and certainly a more suitable subject for true art than those aspects of the world sullied by human artifice (CULTURAL PRIMITIVISM). It differs significantly from the literary movements which were to follow it, REALISM and NATURALISM, in where it finds its values. Employing the commonplace, the natural, the simple as its materials, it seeks always to find the Absolute, the Ideal, by transcending the actual, whereas REALISM finds its values in the actual and NATURALISM in the scientific laws which undergird the actual (see NATURALISM).

Ultimately, it must be admitted that the conflict of ideas and attitudes which occurred in the eighteenth century and which saw the triumph of *romanticism* over CLASSICISM, however much exaggerated in standard literary histories, did go a very long way toward the establishment of our modern democratic world, and where REALISM and NATURALISM are significantly different from *romanticism*, they are closer to it than they are to the CLASSICISM with which it broke. Wherever faith in the individual and in freedom from rules, systems, or even from RATIONALISM appears, there one aspect of *romanticism* speaks. Contradictory as its attributes are and however true Professor Lovejoy's assertion that it should be spoken of always in the plural, *romanticisms* shape the controlling attitudes of the democratic world. See NATURALISM, REALISM, NEOCLASSICISM, CLASSICISM, PRIMITIVISM, GOTHIC, ROMANTIC CRITICISM, ROMANTIC PERIOD IN ENGLISH LITERATURE, ROMANTIC PERIOD IN AMERICAN LITERATURE.

Modern: A term applied to one of the main directions in writing in this century. It is not a chronological designation but one suggestive of a loosely defined congeries of characteristics. Much twentieth-century literature is not "modern" in the common sense of the term, as much that is contemporary is not. *Modern* refers to a group of characteristics, and not all of them appear in any one writer who merits the designation *modern*.

In a broad sense, *modern* is applied to writing marked by a strong and conscious break with traditional forms and techniques of expression. It employs a distinctive kind of IMAGINATION, one that insists on having its general frame of reference within itself. It thus practices the solipsism of which Allen Tate accused the modern mind: it believes that we create the world in the act of perceiving it. *Modern* implies a historical discontinuity, a sense of alienation, of loss, and of despair. It not only rejects history, but also rejects the society of whose fabrication history is a record. It rejects traditional values and assumptions, and it rejects equally the RHETORIC by which they were communicated. It elevates the individual and the inner being over the social human being, and prefers the unconscious to the self-conscious. The psychologies of Freud and Jung have been seminal in the *modern* movement in literature (see FREUDIANISM and JUNGIAN CRITICISM). Its most interesting artistic strategies are its attempts to deal with the unconscious and the MYTHOPOEIC. It is basically anti-intellectual, celebrating passion and will over reason and systematic morality. In many respects it is a reaction against REALISM and NATURALISM and the scientific postulates on which they rest. Although by no means can all *modern* writers be termed philosophical existentialists, EXISTENTIALISM has created a schema within which much of the *modern* temper can see a reflection of its attitudes and assumptions (see EXISTENTIALISM). The *modern* revels in a dense and often unordered actuality as opposed to the practical and systematic, and in exploring that actuality as it exists in the mind of the writer it has been richly experimental with language FORM, SYMBOL, and MYTH.

The *modern* has meant a decisive break with tradition in most of its manifestations, and what has been distinctively worthwhile in the literature of this century has come, in considerable part, from this *modern* temper. Merely to name some of the writers who belong in the *modern* tradition, although none of them partake of all of it, is to indicate the vitality, variety, and artistic success of *modern* writing: T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, W. B. Yeats, W. H. Auden, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Henry Adams, André Gide, Marcel Proust, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Stéphane Mallarmé, Rainer Maria Rilke, Thomas Mann, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Rimbaud. And such a list could be continued for many pages.

The Modernist Period in English Literature: *The Modernist Period* in England may be considered to begin with the first World War in 1914, to be marked by the strenuousness of that experience and by the flowering of talent and experiment that came during the boom of the twenties and that fell away during the ordeal of the economic depression in the 1930's. The catastrophic years of the second World War, which made England an embattled fortress, profoundly and negatively marked everything British, and it was followed by a period of desperate uncertainty, a sadly diminished age. By 1965, which to all purposes marked an end to the *Modernist Period*, the uncertainty was giving way to anger and protest.

In the early years of the *Modernist Period*, the novelists of the *Edwardian Age* continued as major figures, with Galsworthy, Wells, Bennett, Forster, and Conrad dominating the scene, and to be joined before the 'teens were over by Somerset Maugham. A new *fiction*, centering itself in the experimental examination of the inner self was coming into being in the works of writers like Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf. It reached its peak in the publication in 1922 of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, a book perhaps as influential as any *prose* work by a British writer in this century. In highly differing ways D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, and Evelyn Waugh protested against the nature of modern society; and the maliciously witty novel, as Huxley and Waugh wrote it in the twenties and thirties, was typical of the attitude of the age and is probably as truly representative of the English *novel* in the contemporary period as is the *novel* exploring the private self through the *stream of consciousness*. In the thirties and forties, Joyce Cary and Graham Green produced a more traditional *fiction* of great effectiveness, and Henry Green made comedy of everyday life. Throughout the period English writers have practiced the *short story* with distinction; notable examples being Katherine Mansfield and Somerset Maugham, working in the tradition of Chekhov.

The theater saw the social *plays* of Galsworthy, Jones, and Pinero, the *play* of ideas of Shaw, and the *comedy of manners* of Maugham—all well-established in the *Edwardian Age*—continue and be joined by Noel Coward's *comedy*, the proletarian *drama* of Sean O'Casey, the serious *verse plays* of T. S. Eliot and Christopher Fry, and the high craftsmanship of Terence Rattigan.

Perhaps the greatest changes in literature, however, came in *poetry* and *criticism*. In 1914 Bridges was *Poet Laureate*; he was succeeded in 1930 by John Masefield, who died in 1967. Wilfred Owen was one of the most powerful poetic voices of the early years of the contemporary period, but his career ended with an untimely death in the first World War. Through the period Yeats continued poetic creation, steadily modifying his style and subjects to his late form. At the time of his death in 1939 he probably shared with T. S. Eliot the distinction of being the most influential *poet* in the British Isles. Yet Eliot's *The Waste Land*, although its author was American, was the most important single poetic publication in England in the period. In the work of Yeats and Eliot, of W. H. Auden, of Stephen Spender, of C. Day-Lewis, of Edith Sitwell, and of Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose *poems* were posthumously published in 1918, a new *poetry* came emphatically into being. The death at thirty-nine of Dylan Thomas in 1953 silenced a powerful lyric voice, which had already produced fine *poetry* and gave promise of doing even finer work. T. S. Eliot and I. A. Richards, along with T. E. Hulme, Herbert Read, F. R. Leavis, Cyril Connolly, and others, created an informed, essentially anti-Romantic, *analytical criticism*, centering its attention on the work of art itself.

During the period between 1914 and 1965, in the truest sense modernism (see *MODERN*) as a literary mode developed and gained a powerful ascendancy, and disparate as many of the writers and movements of the period were, they seem, in hindsight, to have shared most of the fundamental assumptions about art, humanity, and life that are embraced in the term *MODERN*. But however much the literary movement in the Modern Period seems to have a unified history, Great Britain was during the time in the process of national and

cultural diminution, for England in the twentieth century has watched her political and military supremacy gradually dissipate, and since the second World War she has found herself greatly reduced in the international scene and torn by internal economic and political troubles. Her writers during these turbulent and unhappy years turned inward for their subject matter and expressed bitter and often despairing cynicism. Her major literary figures in the *Modernist Period*, as they were in the *Edwardian Age*, were often non-English. Her chief poets were Irish, American, and Welsh; her most influential novelists, Polish and Irish; her principal dramatists, Irish and American. See *Outline of Literary History*.

Romanticism

In the late 18th century Romanticism was a revolt against the aristocratic social and political norms of the previous Age of Reason and a reaction against the scientific rationalization of nature found in the dominant philosophy of the 18th century, as well as a reaction to the Industrial Revolution. It was embodied most strongly in the visual arts, music, and literature, but had a major impact on historiography, education and the natural sciences.

Naturalism

Naturalistic writers were influenced by the evolution theory of Charles Darwin. They believed that one's heredity and social environment determine one's character and influence the actions of its subjects. 2. Characteristics of naturalism Naturalism is a new and harsher of realism, The term naturalism itself came from Emile Zola. It is believed that he sought a new idea to convince the reading public of something new and more modern in his fiction. He argued that his innovation in fiction-writing was the creation of characters and plots based on the scientific method. Skinnerian principles of learning through conditioning and the Darwinian hierarchy of the survival of the fittest are the underlying themes involved in shaping the human character. There are many defining characteristics of literary naturalism.

Realism

Realism was an art movement, associated with the era of the Great Depression in the US (roughly the 1930s), that depicted the everyday realities of life. Social realism was critical of the social, economic, and racial conditions that made life challenging for the working classes and poor. Social realism in the US took the form of painting, photography, literature, printing and drawing, sculpture, and more. Many of the artists were employed as part of the Depression-era programs of the New Deal, namely the Farm Security Administration and the Works Progress Administration. The resources in this set highlight the artists, art forms, and the subject matter that were central to the social realist movement.

Modernism

Modernism is both a philosophical movement and an art movement that, along with cultural trends and changes, arose from wide-scale and far-reaching transformations in Western society during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Among the factors that shaped modernism were the development of modern industrialism and the rapid growth of cities, followed then by reactions to the horrors of World War I. Modernism also rejected the certainty of Enlightenment thinking, although many modernists also rejected religious belief. Instead, modernists explored secular morality. That is, a set of moral and ethical standards not affixed to historical periods, tradition or religious institutions.